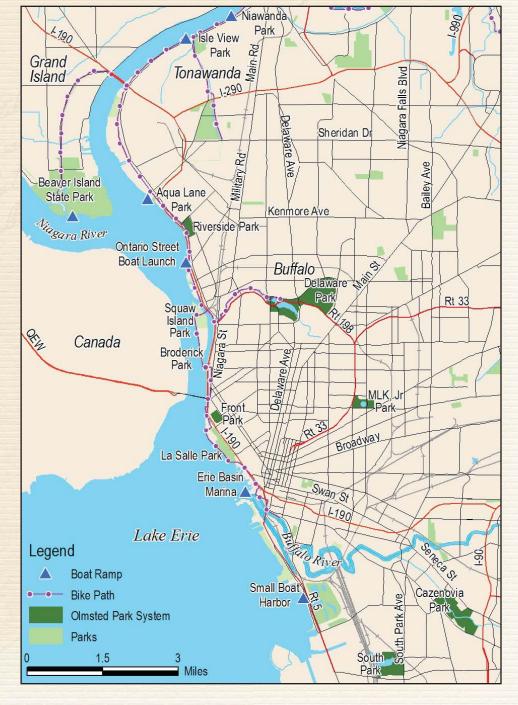
5.0 Context

Regional Context

The site for Black Rock Canal Park, currently occupied by the Ontario Street Boat Launch and Cornelius Creek Park, is located at a highly visible location between the Niagara River and Interstate190 (the Niagara Section of the New York State Thruway) in the vicinity of the Black Rock and Riverside neighborhoods of Buffalo, New York. According the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), over 69,000 vehicles drive past the park site on I-190 each day. Many of these vehicles are driven by visitors to the area who are getting a first impression of the City of Buffalo and its waterfront. And while the mighty Niagara River is always scenic, the Ontario Street Boat Launch in the foreground leaves much to be desired.

The Black Rock Canal Park site is located along a string of waterfront parks that include the Bird Island Pier, Broderick Park, Squaw Island Park, and Tow Path Park, However, none of these parks offer the ability for members of the public to launch a boat. The nearest public launch downriver to the north is located at the foot of Sheridan Drive near Agua Lane Park in the Town of Tonawanda, approximately two miles away. To the south, the nearest public launch is at Erie Basin Marina in downtown Buffalo. approximately five miles away.



Historic Context

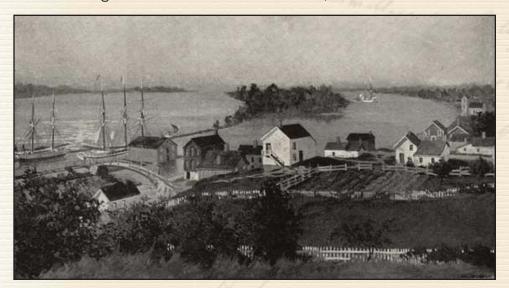
The historic Village of Black Rock extended along the Niagara River from the location of the former black rock (in the vicinity of today's Niagara and School Streets) north, past Scajaquada Creek, to Austin Street. The namesake black rock was a huge wedge of dark limestone that projected at a northwesterly angle into the Niagara River. Its flat surface was 200 feet wide at its northern end and rose four or five feet above the normal level of the river, forming a natural pier and protected harbor.¹

Settlement began in the area after New York State, in

United States and Great Britain from June 1812 to the spring of 1815, although the peace treaty ending the war was signed in Europe in December 1814. Since the end of the American Revolution in 1783, the United States had been irritated by the failure of the British to withdraw from American territory along the Great Lakes, by the British backing of the Indians on America's frontiers, and by the unwillingness of the British to sign commercial agreements favorable to the United States. The United States at first attempted to change these policies by economic means, which proved unsuccessful, and so in 1812 resorted to war. Black Rock devoted most of

its manpower to the defense of its naval yards on Scajaquada Creek. Both Black Rock and Buffalo were torched by British invaders in December 1813, but were rebuilt.

The Villages of Black Rock and Buffalo competed to become the western terminus of the Erie Canal. Buffalo, for reasons that included larger harbor capacity and greater distance from the shores of Canada (an antagonist during the War of 1812), eventually won the distinction and the advantages it afforded.³ The black rock was blasted away in the early 1820s for the construction of the Erie Canal.



Black Rock in 1825 (shows Upper Black Rock and the south end of Squaw Island) from The Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo, Severance, Frank H., ed., Buffalo Historical Society, Vol. 16, 1912.

1802, secured title from the Iroquois to a mile-wide strip of land along the length of the Niagara River. The area near the black rock became known as Upper Black Rock, while, downriver, the area north of Scajaquada Creek became known as Lower Black Rock. The Village of Black Rock was founded in 1813 and incorporated as a village in 1839. At the same time that settlement was occurring in Black Rock, the future Village of Buffalo was beginning at the mouth of the Buffalo River. The two villages became partners and rivals.

Several battles of the War of 1812 were fought in Black Rock and Buffalo. The war was fought between the

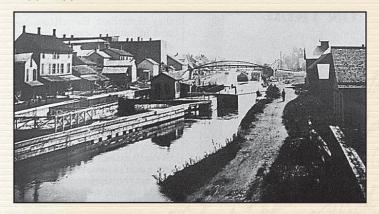
 $1\,$ Suozzi, Paul. <u>Black Rock Chronicle</u>. Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier. Posterlet. The Black Rock harbor and channel provided a protected waterway around the reefs, rapids and fast currents that existed in the upstream portion of the Niagara River. By 1825, a pier and lock was constructed across the channel between Squaw Island and the mainland, in conjunction with the construction of the Erie Canal. This elevated the water level in the channel to the level of Lake Erie, which was four to five feet higher than the Niagara River in that section. Mills and factories located along the Niagara River and Scajaquada Creek to take advantage of water power thus created.

^{2 &}quot;The War of 1812 and Black Rock's Roll". Black Rock Advocate. 28 October 2009 http://blackrockadvocate.blogspot.com

³ Napora, James. "Houses of Worship: A Guide to the Religious Architecture of Buffalo, New York," Pp. 123-124, 144

Context

In 1833 a lock (Lock #72) was built in the Erie Canal near the foot of Austin Street, which fostered the growth of the Black Rock community north of Scajaquada Creek. The water power from the Black Rock channel, the Erie Canal and the development of railroad corridors advanced the presence of milling and other industry in Black Rock.



Erie Canal Lock #72 in Black Rock, ca. 1900 from Diversion of Water from the Great Lakes and Niagara River, United States. Army. Corps of Engineers, James Goold Warren, United States Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, 1921.

Buffalo continued to grow and prosper due to the advantages afforded by Lake Erie, the Erie Canal, and early railroads. The city annexed Black Rock in 1854. The Lower Black Rock area retained its identity and its name over time and is known as the Black Rock neighborhood today.

In the 1870s, the International Railway Bridge, an engineering marvel at the time, connected the US and Canada at Black Rock. The Black Rock Rail Yard handled passenger service and commercial transport of goods to and from Canada. Following the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the construction of the US interstate highway system, Canada's Queen Elizabeth highway, and the increase of commercial air travel, the Black Rock Rail Yard lost its passenger service and later most of its commercial freight service. The railroad bridge, however, remains in heavy usage and is one of the most important rail crossings between the US and Canada.⁴

Until the late 1800s, the area north of today's Hertel Avenue was mostly farmland, except for development directly along the Niagara River and Erie Canal. With Black Rock developing as an industrial center, many



Black Rock Lock between the mainland and Squaw Island pictured ca. 1910 (above) and today (below). The International Railroad Brdige is seen in the background of each.
image sources: postcard ca. 1910 from eriecanal.org, photo of the Black Rock Lock today from buffaloh.com



families began moving to less industrialized areas to the north. There, Buffalo's Riverside neighborhood offered a beautiful riverfront location that was a short trolley ride north of the Black Rock factories.⁵

The Erie Canal, once so busy, was abandoned in 1918. It was polluted and considered a menace to safety in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1930-40s, the canal was filled in between Buffalo and Tonawanda. The Niagara Section (I-190) of the NYS Thruway was build atop the former Erie Canal in the late 1950s. I-190 created a physical barrier between the river and the neighborhoods of Black Rock and Riverside, whose early development was so closely tied to the river.

^{4 &}quot;Black Rock, Buffalo, New York." Wikipedia. 28 October 2009 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Rock,_Buffalo,_New_York.

⁵ Black Rock-Riverside Good Neighbors' Planning Alliance. <u>Building a Neighborhood of Choice: A Neighborhood Plan for the Riverside Planning Community.</u> January 2007. 17 p.

^{6 &}quot;Pollution, Depression, World War II, Exotics". Western New York Heritage Press. http://wnyheritagepress.org/features/canalsidebar.htm

Ship Wreck

There is a ship wreck recorded offshore from the boat launch about mid way across the Niagara River. According to nautical charts it is in about nineteen feet of water. The ship wreck is most likely one of the two known War of 1812 wrecks located in the vicinity. The vessel, which is 40 – 50 feet long, has a double planked oak hull and shows evidence of a fire on board. When divers discovered the remains in 1963, they found several cannons and 22 muskets made by John Miler, Bordentown, NJ in 1808.

The wreck is most likely the 100 ton US brig Adams (later renamed HMS Detroit) built in 1802 by the US government. This vessel was lost to the British when Gen Hull surrendered at Detroit, and was renamed HMS Detroit. US Lieutenant Elliot recaptured her at Fort Erie in October 1812. The battle exhausted all Elliot's ammunition so they cut the anchor cable and drifted till they stranded on Squaw Island "near the American side". Prisoners and the Detroit's crew got to the American side in small boats. Seven British soldiers tried to burn the vessel but were driven off. The ship could not be got off so Elliot burned her.8



HMS Detroit painting by E.A Hodgkinson

Archaeology

An archaeological assessment of the Black Rock Canal Park property has not been completed as part of this project. The site has been significantly altered over the years. The first significant disturbance occurred when the Erie Canal was excavated. In the mid 1900s, the Niagara Section of the New York State Thruway was constructed over the route of the canal. The Ontario Street Boat Launch itself is constructed on fill behind the sheet pile bulkhead that forms its edge.

Potential Users

Local Residents

Black Rock Canal Park is located in a heavily populated area; per the 2000 Census, the US population within a two mile radius was approximately 38,000. The City of Buffalo itself had a population over 292,000 per the 2000 Census and the current population is estimated to be approximately 271,000.

Visitors

Black Rock Canal Park has the opportunity to attract a diversity of users. Currently the park is frequented by boaters, anglers, people seeking to view the river, and people biking along the Riverwalk. Some divers currently use the boat launch to enter the river. Proposed improvements to the park will make it more accessible to boaters, including paddlers and users of motor boats, and a proposed store on site catering to divers' and boaters' needs will provide an additional amenity. Anglers will have a more diverse choice of spots from which to fish. Sightseers currently use the park to view the Niagara River; additional amenities such as opportunities to view and learn about aquatic life, an improved physical setting, and an attractive well marked entrance will attract additional sightseers to the park. The addition of interpretative materials about the development of Black Rock, Riverside, the City of Buffalo, the Erie Canal, and the Seaway Trail will make the park marketable and more attractive to culture and heritage tourists. Promotional materials about the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the Seaway Trail (including the Dive the Seaway Trail program) could be utilized to promote the park and attract visitors.

⁷ Georgann Wachter (Wachter@eriewrecks.com). "Re: FW: Shipwreck Inquiry – Niagara River". E-mail to Brendon Baillod (BBaillod@glhec.org) and Molly Vendura (mvendura@pjscompany.com). 5 October 2009.

⁸ Mansfield, John Brandt, ed., <u>History of the Great Lakes</u>. Volume I, Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899, 132 and 141 p.